

Digital Muslim Review
Vol. 1 No. 1, June 2023
Pages : 36-45
DOI : 10.32678/dmr.v1i1.5
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Received : 10/05/2023
Revised : 30/07/2023
Accepted : 17/08/2023

Hybridisation of Muslim Millennials' Religious Identity in the Digital Era

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Abstract

This article explores the social movement paradigm in the millennial Muslim generation in the digital era through social media platforms. This research uses the concept of social movement as one of the collective behaviours, making the millennial generation's social movement a new phenomenon in the Islamic movement in Indonesia. This research uses the Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) approach (Roller, 2015; Smith et al., 2009) to understand, analyse, and explore the phenomenon. The socio-religious movement for the millennial Muslim generation through Islamic studies on social media was examined using a qualitative approach. The research findings reflect that the social movement occurs communally, giving birth to a socio-religious movement. The millennial Muslim movement has built a new identity as a religious community that obeys Islamic rules. The social movement intends to make young people close to the Qu'ran, pray on time, actively seek religious knowledge, and spread the message of Islam through social media platforms.

Keywords: Social movement, Identity Hybridization, Social Media, Digital Era



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Introduction

The world is entering the 5.0 or digital industrial revolution era, an era of rapid information and communication technology development. The emergence of the digital age has impacted the reorganisation of daily life. The acceleration of information today ultimately has implications for social and cultural aspects. In addition, the issue of religion and all its elements has become one of the most critical issues in the digital era. Several studies have shown that an environment full of communication and information technology also changes religious patterns at the level of understanding and practice (Fakhrurroji, 2019).

The millennial era is an era of rapid development of information and communication technology. The term millennial, introduced by Hungarian sociologist Karl Mannheim, was coined because this is the only generation that has passed the second millennium. The Indonesian Muslim young population is experiencing a shift in tradition, which used to be traditional, transforming into a digital system. This transformation certainly affects the Muslim generation's identity, traditions, religion, and social patterns. According to the projection, the population of Indonesia's Muslim generation, which is the majority in the country, will increase due to a demographic surge (Maryolo, 2018).

Islamic religious actors from various backgrounds have presented new discourses and discussions contextualising Islam in all fields. It has essential positive and negative implications. Some of these neo-Islamic actors do not have good religious roots. The implication is that they manipulate religious symbols and rituals. In the digital sphere of Islam, young people seem to have a greater role than the older ones from the previous eras. They appear as trendsetters in the global sphere who factually contextualise Islam in their style. This is not without excess because the digital era allows many bad things to happen, including the dissemination of conservatism, radicalism, and terrorism.

Today, we face multiple realities: the social and virtual. Both are present simultaneously and can influence the pattern of society, including the generation of Muslims in Indonesia. The millennial Muslim generation is experiencing a process of crossing socio-religious identities, although their social bases still influence their religious attitudes and behaviours. This symptom is called identity hybridisation. The Center for the Study of Religion and Culture (CSRC), the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) UIN Jakarta, Convey Indonesia, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) concluded that the most dominant marker of young Muslims today is the hybridisation of identity (Bamualim et al., 2018).

The dynamics of society that are developing today give rise to the character of a society with a multicultural and multireligious vision so that sometimes it is considered to threaten local identity. This threat appears as an identity crisis and loss of orientation of moral, ethical, and spiritual values. The community feel to have lost their identity due to the rapid dynamics of society that tend to impact morality, norms, ethics, spirituality, and other life systems (Rahmawati, 2018).

Public unrest about the dynamics of society that threatens the identity crisis has given

birth to opportunities for the development of social movements that are increasingly broad and open. The emergence of the social movement is a discourse that develops in a society constantly changing from time to time. This social movement grows according to the trend of development orientation and ongoing modernisation in a country that can solve this identity crisis problem. The new social movement approach is a form of knowledge previously inspired by concerns about the identity crisis that occurred in society (Porta & Pavan, 2017).

The growing phenomenon of the social movement reveals several reasons for the massive social movement, namely (1) The popularity of books of various Islamic views (Salafi, Tarbawi, Tahriri, etc.), (2) Campus-based Islamic studies, mosques, and tablig congregations, (3) Internet and social media access to popular Islamic literature, (4) The emergence of ustadz (religious teacher) and celebrities; (5) The emergence of hijrah communities; (6) Lightweight lecture topics that discuss the association of young people; and (7) Non-dawah activities (photography, design, marketing, etc.) that are associated with Islam. This conclusion is supported by the research of Fajriani and Sugandi (2019). They assert that the driving factor for the millennial Muslim generation to do a social movement is because they feel a soul void that causes boredom. They think more critically and easily access religious information, causing the millennial Muslim generation to be more open to lifestyle in accordance with religious teachings.

Moreover, social media plays an important role in spreading the social movement, especially for the millennial Muslim generation which can accommodate functions, roles, and activities related to religious rituals (Zulhazmi & Hastuti, 2018). The presence of social media makes it easier for the millennial Muslim generation to find their identity through their role models in making hijrah. This strategy of spreading religion through social media targets the millennial generation who live in the digital era. Social media has become a popular platform to mobilise the millennial generation's Islamic messages (Hew, 2018). The millennial-style communication strategy has proven to impact many young people to change their lifestyle to suit their faith and appearance. Social media can facilitate the spread of this hijrah movement by posting all Islamic contents to make other Muslims more religious (Pramiyanti, 2019).

This article uses the Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) approach (Roller, 2015; Smith et al., 2009). This study took place from March to May 2023 in Jakarta and Banten. With this approach, the research aims to understand, analyse, and explore how the interviewees interpret the phenomenon. The movement was examined using a qualitative approach because the problem is a social phenomenon. The qualitative approach intends to understand the behaviour, perceptions, motivations, and actions experienced by the millennial Muslim generation (Moleong, 2007). The author tried to find consistent patterns from the available data related to the attitudes and behaviours of young Muslims in responding to various issues, primarily related to the cross-disputes of the relationship between Islamic religious doctrine and social life in the digital era.

Young Muslims' Religiousness Identity Hybridization in the Digital Age

One of the key findings of this research is that young Muslim activists today experience identity hybridisation. What is meant by the hybridisation of identity here is the existence of a religious identity as a result of the crossover of religious affiliation and orientation based on social-political dynamics. Religious orientation is based on the socio-political and religious dynamics they witness and the respondents' interactions with their social environment.

Theoretically, the concept of identity hybridisation is not a new phenomenon. Scholars and social-religious observers have used this term to read the phenomenon of Islam, including Islam in Indonesia. For example, the Dutch scholar at University College London (UCL) Carool Kirsten uses the term 'cultural hybridisation' to read and understand the development of Islamic thought in Indonesia. One of the issues he examines is the emergence of the idea of 'Islamic renewal' in Indonesia with the presence of, for instance, Nurcholish Madjid. In Kirsten's view, Nurcholish Madjid is one of the figures having a mixed cultural-religious background. Nurcholis Madjid was born into a family of an active member of Masyumi. Madjid grew up in a traditionalist environment but spent his adolescence and teenage years at the modern boarding school Gontor Ponorogo. After completing his studies in the Faculty of Adab at IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, he continued his studies at the University of Chicago in the United States to study Islamic history and thought. Upon returning to Indonesia, Madjid did not dissolve into the two main currents Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), but offered an idea of renewal that observers call neo-modernism.

Carool Kristen also mentions other names he considers to have experienced identity hybridisation, including activist figures of Muhammadiyah such as M. Dawam Rahardjo, Kuntowijoyo, and Muslim Abdurrahman. Kirsten also gives a similar description when discussing the profiles of Kyai Abdurrahmad Wahid (Gus Dur) and Kyai Mustafa Bisri (Gus Mus). When speaking about Islam, those figures can approach it from the traditionalist or modernist perspectives and social and cultural theories (Bamualim et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the current generation of Indonesian Muslims tends to listen to religious issues on social media. Virtual social fan pages have overgrown today. The existence of this virtual social has become an alternative Islamic literacy for millennial Muslim youths. Virtual social media usually contains scriptural contents that understand religion by referencing the Qur'an and hadith without interpretation. In addition to social fan pages, videos are a strategy of celebrity *ustadz* in preaching. This strategy began with the development of new media where the millennial generation prefers virtual-based things. There are various reasons that millennial Muslims prefer virtual social. They feel that online lectures are more flexible and effective wherever they are, even though they are not in a place of worship (mosque). They tend to watch online courses on social media and then share them with their followers. Frequently, we find them idolising celebrity *ustadz* rather than

scholars. Celebrity ustadz are in demand because they are always present to provide Islamic knowledge through their virtual space. This tendency triggers the fanaticism and scriptural tolerance of today's millennial Muslims.

The hybridisation of identity happens due to crossing religious affiliations and orientations based on the dynamics and socio-political-religious interactions in their social environment. This is what gives birth to a new identity. CSRC, PPIM UIN Jakarta, Convey Indonesia, and UNDP concluded that identity hybridization is the most dominant marker of young Muslims today. This process is influenced by their experiences from adolescence to adulthood (Maryolo, 2018). For example, a young man was an activist who persistently fought to enforce Islamic law through Komite Persiapan Penegakan Syariat Islam (KPPSI) and other organisations. However, his struggle lost because he did not get enough responses from his regional constituents. Activists who used to play an active role in the sharia movement now have to change course because they did not obtain sufficient support. Therefore, they prefer to work in community empowerment unrelated to religious issues. On the other hand, this phenomenon provides a positive trend in the sense that there is an openness of thought to accept new values without leaving the socio-religious base.

From this phenomenon, there seems to be a high level of caution, especially in determining young Muslims' religious views and attitudes. Therefore, this research found that the phenomenon of young Muslims in Indonesia today, especially among student activists and students, is often coloured by a textual-literal attitude. The attitude of caution and taking safe steps by referring to aspects of literalism for students and students is reasonable. Moreover, the religious issues raised in this study are related to *ijtihad* topics, and many have even generated controversy in Indonesia, such as the case of Christmas greetings, non-Muslim leadership, and interfaith marriage. This study claims that the religious views of young people are at a stage where opinions are based on religious normative arguments. It is, therefore, natural that there is a conservative tendency. However, many of their thoughts are moderated when the themes proposed and discussions are brought into the public sphere.

Religious movements are one of the efforts to overcome the problem of identity hybridisation in the aspect of individual religiosity in their lives. Recently, a movement has emerged in Indonesia that was initiated by a group of millennial Muslims who transformed by making changes from a religious aspect. Religious movements are a form of religious transformation implemented in changes in religious behaviour through group activities (Rochimah, 2018). The religious movement developed as the hijrah movement initiated by the millennial generation.

The social movement phenomenon is quite popular among the younger generation. Such a phenomenon is closely related to migration from non-Islamic to Islamic lifestyles (Lanti, Ebih, & Dermawan, 2019). The role and position of millennial actors in the hijrah movement have collectively built a new identity as religious people who obey Islamic rules. As a social movement phenomenon, hijrah is a form of collective action that provides awareness of the importance of religion in human life (Saputra, Pujiati, & Simanihuruk,

2020). The social movement is one of the popular social movements that has developed into a social trend followed communally (Addini, 2019). If we look at the history, the development of hijrah has occurred since the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW and his companions. The hijrah event was seen when the Prophet Muhammad SAW built an Islamic socio-cultural in Medina by doing *muakhot* (fraternising) the muhajirin with the anshar (Ibrahim, 2016; Fajriani & Sugandi, 2019).

The Islamic social movement is a form of dynamic social reality in society. This reality occurs globally, showing that many social movements are in the name of hijrah. The description of this Islamic-based social movement has been an issue that has long been discussed. Milton-Edwards (1992) expresses that one of the phenomena of Islamic social movements that caught the world's attention was in December 1987, when there was an uprising in Palestine with Israeli troops. Since Israeli forces abused religious rights, the Palestinian government intensified and advanced the call for jihad as the expression of hijrah. In addition, social movements also occur in the United States, like the World Hijab Day movement, which is celebrated on February 1. Nazma Khan initiated this movement to counter the Islamophobic narrative about the hijab (Raihanah, 2017).

In Indonesia, the issue of religious movements has occurred many times. Pramesuari (2020) asserts that the Indonesia Without Dating Movement (Indonesia Tanpa Pacaran/ITP), initiated by La Ode Munafar, is one of the movements that invites people not to date and oppose the practice of adultery because it is not in line with Islamic teachings. This social movement considers dating destructive to the nation's generation, especially youths. So the ITP movement invites more people to apply the concept of Islam. Another socio-religious movement that received enormous attention was the 212 Movement. Susilowati, Yunus, and Sholeh (2019) think that the 212 movement was a new social movement with a religious identity or moral force that occurred peacefully. The 212 Movement was one form of defending the country and defending tawhid. This movement was attended by enormous elements of Muslims in Indonesia regardless of status, group, organisation, party, and ethnicity. The 212 movement made Islamic identity peaceful and loving. It was obvious where the movement participants maintained ethics in conveying aspirations.

The various phenomena above clearly do not heed the true meaning of hijrah. In Indonesia, the existence of a social movement with its true meaning remains a wave of Islamic revival in a new nuance because it occurs massively. The millennial Muslim generation is an element of society that forms patterns in the hijrah phenomenon. The meaning of hijrah for the millennial Muslim generation departs from the collective awareness of self-identity, which is part of Islam, so that awareness arises to contribute to practising their religion (Saputra, Pujiati, & Simanihuruk, 2020). James, Elizabeth, and Hope (2015) describe the views of the millennial Muslim generation regarding the role of religion. They concluded that millennial Muslim generations from various countries believe in the truth of Islam and that Islam can play an important role in all aspects of life, including the future of a country.

Fajriani and Sugandi (2019) state that the driving factor for the millennial generation to make hijrah is because they feel a soul void that causes boredom. This millennial Muslim

generation is more open to the Islamic lifestyle because they are more critical and have easy access to religious information. Indirectly, lifestyle changes that tend to be religious will form a cultural frame that supports the development of the hijrah movement among the millennial Muslim generation. The term hijrah directs individuals to a process where they try to become more obedient Muslims (Sunesti, Hasan, & Azca, 2018). Here, the millennial Muslim generation creates a religious identity framed in the construction of the social movement.

Identity Construction and Cultural Framing through the Concept of Social Movement on Social Media

The social movement is a new religious movement currently developing among the millennial Muslim generation. It is undeniable that social media attract the interest of the millennial Muslim generation to engage in the social movement. The social movement with Islamic studies on social media spreads information about Islamic religious studies quickly and widely. The spread of the social movement on social media makes social construction distributed evenly. Every social movement spread by utilising technological elements, including social media, can quickly distribute information and mobilise movements (Merrill, Keightley, & Daphi, 2019).

Social movement spreads through social media platforms such as Youtube, Instagram, Facebook, and so on. For instance, lectures delivered by the Shift activist Ustadz Hanan Attaki are disseminated on social media to reach a wider audience. Some testimonials assert that after watching the lectures, they felt calmer and became more active in worship. Moreover, they changed their behaviours, liked to help others, and lived according to Islamic rules. In other words, social media have played a role in spreading positive aspects of social movements in online activism (Merrill, Keightley, & Daphi, 2020). Online activism in the hijrah movement means participation in social movements facilitated by digital media. The spread of the hijrah movement through social media has proven effective in inviting audiences to follow the same steps (Addini, 2019).

The discourse on the social movement is implemented on social media as a set of attractive and efficient communication messages in identity construction and cultural framing. The construction is achieved by a paradigm shift. The positive response from the social movement among the millennial Muslim generation can build public perceptions, especially the millennial generation, about God in a simple way (Prasanti & Indriani, 2019). Therefore, this hijrah movement aims to make the younger generation the object of society. The construction of a new social movement oriented to the concept of identity places humans free to change their identity and seek new meanings for their identity. The hijrah movement is a place to study and explore religious knowledge, so hijrah is a strengthening and affirmation of identity for them (Prasanti & Indriani, 2019). The role and position of collective actors consciously build a new identity in carrying out hijrah.

Furthermore, cultural framing in the hijrah movement can create activities that can

mobilise, inspire, and legitimise movements by making actors find the meaning of their religiosity. Thus, a social movement campaign can mobilise a group of people to participate (Saputra, Pujiati, & Simanihuruk, 2020). The social movement has become a pattern of social movements carried out by the millennial Muslim generation by packaging religious ideology in social movements built into social life. The cultural framing process is closely related to the discourse of how a social movement through social media can produce meaning, which is then believed to be the truth by the community. From the existence of an on-line social movement, the millennial Muslim generation will find it easier to regulate how they act and behave because they already understand what is justified and not in religion (Riadi & Drajat, 2019). Therefore, cultural framing in this social movement is legitimised by the same meaning shared among the movement's followers. They voluntarily accept the given identity and meaning.

Conclusion

The shifting religious patterns of the millennial Muslim generation have a major influence on the future of religion, especially Islam. In this situation, they must deal with Islamism, which offers hope for change. Religion has become a sensitive narrative that shapes social constructs in society and young people today. Thus, there is an attraction to something sacred that is divinely oriented compared to profane relations. The identity of these social movement actors changes the perspective of religiosity and how to become religious. Cultural framing also occurs in this hijrah movement, where social movement actors campaign and mobilise every action that the community believes to be the truth. In addition, religious ideology becomes essential in framing the hijrah movement that guides activities and behaviours.

Acknowledgement

This research was impossible without the involvement of many parties and institutions: CSRC, PPIM UIN Jakarta, CONVEY, and UNDP. Along with this research, there are various research programmes with the same theme and target, although with different methods and focuses. These studies are expected to strengthen each other to help us understand better the phenomenon of young Muslims in digital Indonesia.

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